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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D. C. 20505

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18 June 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chairman, COMIREX, IC Staff

FROM: DCI

SUBJECT: SR-71 Overflights of Cuba

This is the matter I mentioned to you  
this morning.

William J. Casey

Attachment:  
NIC 02786-85

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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

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National Intelligence Council

NIC 02786-85

5 June 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH: Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council *HEM*

FROM: Robert D. Vickers, Jr.  
National Intelligence Officer for Latin America

SUBJECT: SR-71 Overflights of Cuba

1. The US Intelligence Community has long supported a program of periodic SR-71 overflights of Cuba, primarily to ensure that no offensive missile systems are being introduced into the island, and to check on other military developments such as new airfield construction, surface-to-air missile deployment, and status of ground force units. Although military and other strategic facilities throughout the island are covered periodically by satellite imagery, the process is still relatively slow, and lesser priority targets may get coverage less than once a year. Furthermore, some parts of the island are imaged rarely because of cloud coverage during satellite overflights. Only the SR-71 system can provide simultaneous coverage of the entire island and give us greater confidence that no strategic systems have been introduced.

2. Castro is vigorously opposed to the overflights, arguing that they are a direct violation of Cuba's sovereignty and challenge the regime's capabilities to defend itself. On occasion, he has used the overflights as an excuse to retaliate diplomatically against the US, as in August 1984 when he temporarily broke off the talks on the Mariel excludables for several months.

3. As a result of Castro's negative reaction, the State Department has often opposed SR-71 overflights, arguing that they may upset some delicate negotiations initiative that is either planned or already underway. State also argues that the SR-71 flights are not really necessary unless we have a valid intelligence concern that cannot be satisfied by satellite imagery, and that past flights generally have produced little of intelligence value. Thus while State has agreed to SR-71 overflights on an ad hoc basis, it has consistently opposed allowing them to be flown on a regular schedule to ensure periodic coverage of the island.

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